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ART. III.—*The Works of LORD BYRON in Verse and Prose, including his Letters, Journals, &c., with a Sketch of his Life.* New York : A. V. Blake. 8vo. 1843.

THE revolution in the character of imaginative literature, which has taken place in the present century, had its most violent and convulsionary manifestation in Lord Byron. In an article on Wordsworth in our last number, we referred to some of the external influences which stimulated the genius of the great poets of the age, and laid particular stress on spiritual philosophy and the French Revolution. These two agencies, of course, were modified by the individual peculiarities of the poets they influenced. Wordsworth, in whose temperament the thoughtful element predominated over the impulsive, impressed on them the qualities of his own nature ; and their effect on him is seen in the preëminence given in his writings to spiritual things and to humanity, to the imagination and the affections. On Byron, whose mind was naturally more under the dominion of sensibility, and rendered almost chaotic by suffering and error, the radical influences flowing from the French Revolution operated with more power, and were controlled by less moral and humane feeling.

Indeed, if any person can be pointed out as the mouth-piece of the harsher revolutionary spirit of his time, it is assuredly Lord Byron. The extraordinary popularity of his poems, and the notoriety of his life, have led to various essays on his character and writings, differing in object and mode of treatment, and all more or less one-sided. Denunciation and panegyric have both been lavished upon his name. Those who represent him as a fiend, seizing with a sort of diabolical instinct on all that is bad and impious, and overthrowing with a kind of ferocious energy all that is good and holy, and those who represent him as little less than a saint, seem equally to err ; and the error of both arises in a great degree from an attempt to delineate a character which shall be consistent with itself. Byron may almost be said to have had no character at all. Every attempt to bring his virtues or his vices within the boundaries of a theory, or to represent his conduct as guided by any

predominant principle of good or evil, has been accompanied by blunders and perversions. His nature had no simplicity or unity. He seems an embodied antithesis, — a mass of contradictions, — a collection of opposite frailties and powers. Such was the versatility of his mind and morals, that it is hardly possible to discern the connection between the giddy goodness and the brilliant wickedness which he delighted to exhibit. His habit of mystification, of darkly hinting remorse for sins he never committed, of avowing virtues he never practised, increases the difficulty. From his actions, his private journals and correspondence, his poems, — from all those sources whence we derive a consistent idea of other writers, — it is hard to obtain a harmonious notion of him. It is quite easy to sustain any theory of his character, good, bad, or indifferent, by numerous extracts from his writings and undoubted events of his life. Friends or enemies need not droop for lack of materials to justify either blame or eulogy. Nothing can be more simple than to prove, that all in character and life which is ennobling and humane, and all that is debasing and inhuman, from writing hymns to parodying the ten commandments, found in him an able champion ; and that crime and goodness both glittered with new attractions, when seen through the dazzling medium of his diction. From his life and works we obtain the impression, that he was a glutton, and an ascetic ; a spendthrift, and a miser ; a misanthrope, and a cosmopolite ; an aristocrat, and a radical ; an infidel, and a believer ; a debauchee, and a mystic ; a cynic, and a sentimentalist ; a foul libeller of his species, and an eloquent defender of its rights, and a more eloquent mourner over its wrongs ; bewailing and denouncing the literary revolution which made his own writings popular ; pandering to a public which he despised ; pilfering from authors whom he ridiculed ; lashing his own bosom sins when committed by others ; in short, a man continually busy in giving the lie to his thoughts, opinions, tastes, and conduct.

When we reflect upon this assemblage of clashing qualities, these odd irregularities of opinion and action, we are prone to consider him as what somebody calls Voltaire, “ a miraculous child.” He appears a mere collection of veering fancies and impulses, making the voyage of life aimless and rudderless, blown about by every breeze of desire, tossed

about on every wave of passion. We can find in him no fixed principle of good or evil ; no thorough-going worship of god or devil. Yet this comfortable conclusion seems only to lead us deeper into the dilemma. Though apparently without any settled aim, no public man of his time could display a stronger will, could adhere to a purpose with more fixed and sullen obstinacy, could act out or write out with more power whatever he deemed fit. No poet ever stamped upon his writings a deeper impress of personality, or viewed outward objects in a manner more peculiar to himself. Every thing about him is intensely subjective, individual, Byronic, — whether writing “Childe Harold” or “Don Juan,” — whether sipping the waters of Hippocrene, or the stronger waters of Holland and the Rhine.

In his relations with the public we perceive the same consistent inconsistency. He does not appear to have formed any distinct notions of the dignity or the importance of the poet’s vocation. It would be difficult for the most acute analyst to find in his writings what was his theory of human life. Some of his works were published merely, as he expresses it, to “make a row.” Others were reflections of his moods, rather than his opinions. The volatile libertinism of Lucio, and the gloomy fierceness of Timon, he adopted at pleasure. Self is ever uppermost in his mind. The whole world is called upon to listen to a recital of the joys and agonies of George Gordon, Lord Byron. Amidst this most bewildering confusion of qualities and attributes, we are still conscious that one personality circles through and pervades them all. In his coquetry with the public, he seems at once a despot and a slave. He tells his thousands of readers, that they are formed of more vulgar clay than he is, that he despises them from his inmost heart, that their life is engaged in a bustling oscillation between knavery and folly, and that all mankind is but a “degraded mass of animated dust.” Yet he demands their sympathy for all his idiosyncrasies, sins, and errors, and bends his stern pride to follow whatever path of popularity changing circumstances may point out. His mouth is ever at the public ear, though it pour forth nothing but expressions of contempt and hatred. In whatever attitude he places himself, he evidently intends it to be one which shall excite admiration or horror. He could

bear hatred, calumny, the imputation of profligacy, the denunciation of the powerful, the censures of the good, — any thing which carried with it fuel for his sensibility ; but he could not bear neglect or indifference. An expression of contempt for any one of his works excited his ire more than the most hyperbolical expression of horror. The cool cockney, who said that “Don Juan” was “all Billingsgate,” was lifted immediately into importance by the remark.

This dependence on the world, even on the weakest portion of it, by one who professed, in his towering misanthropy, to be superior to its praise or blame, is in marked contrast with the self-reliance of Wordsworth and Shelley. It was one of Byron’s maxims, that the censure of the meanest of mankind is more painful, than the applause of the highest is pleasing. This was a singular opinion to be held by one who strove hard to rank himself among those “gigantic minds,”

“ Whose steep aim

Was, Titan-like, on daring doubts to pile

Thoughts which should call down thunder and the flame
Of Heaven.”

The unsettled condition of Byron’s mind and character may be traced, in a great degree, we think, to the errors and calamities of his life. His misfortunes, however, enabled him the better to reflect the revolutionary spirit of his time. Suffering was his inspiration, and he gave utterance to the thousand and one miseries of his day. The poet of restlessness and impulse, his verse found an echo in many a heart whose unhappiness was voiceless. There was a great amount of passionate radicalism in the community, to which his poetry afforded strength and nutriment. He laid bare the cant of English society, and the corruption of the aristocracy, and lashed them with a whip of scorpions. He illustrated and denounced the social tyranny, by which thousands are driven into crime and prevented from returning to virtue. The arrows of his scorn fell fast and thick among the defenders of political abuses. The renegade, the hypocrite, the bigot, were made to feel the full force of his merciless invective. Wielding an uncontrolled dominion over language, and profusely gifted with all the weapons of sarcasm, hatred, and contempt, he battled fiercely in the service of freedom, and knew well how to overwhelm its adversaries

with denunciations and stormy threats, with ridicule and irony which should eat into their hearts, as rust into iron. He spoke with fiery energy and directness what was burning for expression in the hearts of thousands. The aggressive and destructive character of his political principles had a fierce charm for all whose passions had been wrought into intense or moody strength, by the contemplation of injustice and wrong. He gave voice not only to the political discontents of his time, but to the inward misery, the skeptical distrust of goodness and religion, the diseased sensibility, the half-formed opinions and mad impulses, which characterized the excitable spirits of his age. If he brought no balm to heal, he brought fire to stimulate. He was completely master of the whole rhetoric of despair and desperation. His wilfulness and caprice, the inconsistency not only between his writings and his conduct, but between one portion of his writings and another, far from injuring his influence, tended rather to add a new zest and interest to his compositions and actions. A man whose conduct is swayed by impulse instead of judgment, whose passions are dogmatic, while his intellect is skeptical, who has no distinct object in life to direct his energies, must necessarily exhibit the most glaring contradictions in his opinions and actions; and to these contradictions Lord Byron's sympathizing readers were as liable as himself.

It is a difficult task to determine how far the faults and errors of Byron are to be attributed to original disposition, to bad culture, or to circumstances over which he had no control. He seems to have been born with violent passions, but not specially gifted with intellectual power. The carelessness with which his education was conducted, and some early wounds of vanity and affection, strengthened this natural predominance of impulse over thought. We can see in his youth the same tendency to individualism, the same reference of all things to a personal standard, which characterized his manhood. Early in life, he was accustomed to brood over the mortifications of his vanity and pride, and to indulge in tempestuous outbreaks of passion when he was crossed in his caprices. He gradually came to consider the world as made for him, and unconsciously to subordinate the interests and happiness of others to his own. This selfishness and self-exaggeration were the bane of his life. He

seems never to have taken an enlarged and comprehensive view of society and the world, with reference to his own position in either. When he had committed some act of more than common turpitude, and reaped its natural results in sorrow and bitterness, he experienced a kind of grim satisfaction in throwing the blame upon others. If he had not been deformed in his foot, or if Miss Chaworth had not loved another, or if Lady Byron had not loved herself, the thing would not have happened. This tone of complaint was unmanly and boyish. It was more a revelation of the sufferer's weakness than of the world's injustice. At one time, he seems to have seen through this thin self-deception, and acknowledged that

"The thorns which I have reaped are of the tree
I planted; they have torn me and I bleed;
I should have known what fruit would spring from such a seed."

But, generally, he appears to have been deluded by his passionate selfishness into the belief that his crimes were his misfortunes. This appears exquisitely ridiculous in Mr. Richard Swiveller, and nothing but genius could ever have made it any thing else in Byron.

It was not until he felt the reaction of the selfishness and the opinions of others upon his own, that he revealed the energies of his nature. He certainly would never have been a great poet, had he been a contented man. The attempt to crush opposition, to compel others to acknowledge the claims of his selfishness, wrought his powers into intense action. His strength was the strength of madness and desperation. The first volume of his poems gives no evidence of the power afterwards displayed in "Cain" and "Manfred." They were probably admired by his friends, previous to their publication, and his vanity was satisfied. Then came the stinging and contemptuous *critique* in the Edinburgh Review. The rage which this provoked was the inspiration of the "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers." It is amusing to observe, in this publication, how he not only wreaks vengeance on his reviewer and on all connected with him, but runs a-muck through the streets, and stabs every author that comes in his way. His wounded pride demands a whole hecatomb of victims, the innocent as well as the guilty. It would seem as if the most superficial consideration must have taught him, that many of the feeble poets

whom he lashed had only committed his own sin, that of publishing trifling verses, which had been unduly puffed by journals of little authority; and that the severity of his attack upon them was only a confirmation of the justice of the *critique* on himself. But the pith and nerve of his invective indicated that his mind in its "Hours of Idleness" was a very different thing from his mind in its hours of excitement. The success which his vigorous, but indiscriminate, satire met was balm to his irritated pride; but it pampered some qualities of his nature, which it would have been for his happiness to have stifled. It told him, that he possessed power to fight his way through the world, and to overbear any opposition to his conduct, no matter on what principles of right or wrong it was founded.

We think that this egotism or selfishness in Byron was the parent of many of his vices, inasmuch as it emancipated his mind from the burden of those duties which grow out of man's relations with society. Feeling conscious of strong impulses, and taking pleasure in asserting his independence of the world's code of opinion, he early plunged into vicious excesses. It is well known, that the time which elapsed between the publication of the "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers," and his first visit abroad, was not spent in practising the "Whole Duty of Man." The recklessness with which he indulged in libertinism was only equalled by the detestable coolness with which he referred to it. In a letter to Hodgson, in 1810, he makes the candid confession, that he has found "that nothing but virtue will do in this d——d world. I am tolerably sick of vice, which I have tried in all its agreeable varieties, and mean, on my return, to cut all my dissolute acquaintance, leave off wine and carnal company, and betake myself to politics and decorum." On his return to England, he changed this amiable determination, so far as decorum was concerned, though he paid some little attention to politics. The publication of the first and second cantos of "*Childe Harold*," the great and immediate fame which attended it, and his introduction to the "world of London," to run a new career of brilliant profligacy, constituted one of the eras of his life. Up to this time, his bad qualities do not appear to have become hardened, and, though licentious and careless of restraint, he could hardly be called extremely dissolute. The power of

his genius, likewise, had not been fully developed by circumstances. His mind was also very unsettled, and might perhaps have received a much better direction than it took. In his letters and journals during the period which followed, we see him in a variety of aspects, — sorrowful, misanthropic, proud, vain, “every thing by turns, and nothing long.” He seemed determined to drain the wine of life to the dregs, and to excel in all the pleasant methods of disposing of health, peace, and happiness, which a great metropolis affords. There is a singular blending of flippancy and desperation in his letters and journals at this period. The profanity, ribaldry, and brilliancy, with which they are garnished, the striking thoughts and fancies with which they teem, and the mode of life and condition of mind which they reveal, can hardly be paralleled in the private records of any other man of genius. His ambition was both high and mean, and seemed bent on those objects which would redound to his shame, as well as those which would crown him with glory. He mingled with the wise, the learned, the witty, the beautiful, the dissolute, with equal ease; and he appeared determined to be excelled by none either in literature or licentiousness. He aimed at being both a poet and a man of the world, — Plato and Lord Rochester in one. The impressibility of his mind led him to adopt the standard of each company into which he was thrown. He gradually lost all moral fear. Every thing sacred in life, religion, affection, sentiment, duty, virtue, he could as easily consider matter for mirth as for serious meditation. His love of epigram overcame his moral sentiments and his poetic feeling. His wit was great, for the very reason that it had no restraint from his conscience, and invaded sanctuaries into which the wit of others hesitated to enter. Since the publication of his letters, we discover that his wife, his most intimate friends, even his own cherished feelings, were not safe from its shafts. His whole correspondence is characterized by a brilliant recklessness, in which profanity and coarseness are prominent elements. His letters are richly studded with those emphatic expletives with which wagoners favor their horses.

But it was not until Byron left England for the second time, and for ever, that the condition of mind which his irregularities produced was fully displayed to the world.

He went burning with indignation at real or imagined wrongs, and smarting with the consequences of his errors. From this period, his hatred and contempt of the world deepened in intensity and power, and lent a corresponding strength to his faculties. His residence on the continent filled the measure of his glory and his shame. The splendor, fertility, and daring of his mind, and the hoarded scorn and fiery passion of his heart, were allowed to have full and free expression. His genius "fed on poisons," and they became nutriment to it. There was the same inconsistency in his conduct and writings as before, but his capacity for good and evil had both increased. In almost every thing that he wrote, while on the continent, we perceive the mark of great talent. His letters from Italy, alone, — things thrown off in every variety of mood, and some of them bearing strong evidence of the bottle, — display more genius than can be found in all the first two cantos of "*Childe Harold*." His mind, restrained by no permanent feelings of delicacy, of decorum, of moral or religious duty, and stirred into action by such powerful stimulants as revenge and scorn, developed capacities of which his previous writings had given little evidence. The most sublime and beautiful, as well as the most debasing, portions of his writings, belong to this period of his life. "*The Corsair*" seems tame, when compared with "*Cain*"; and the misanthropy of "*Lara*" appears weak beside the misanthropy of "*Manfred*." The vivid imagination, which glows and glitters in the flood of passionate feeling that overwhelms the reader in the fourth canto of "*Childe Harold*," had absolutely no existence in the "*Hours of Idleness*." And nothing that he had written could boast the variety of description, the wit, the satire, the knowledge of the world, the grace and affluence of fancy, the sovereign command of expression, which surprise and delight us amid the filth and mockery of "*Don Juan*."

Over all these works, amid their most brilliant shows of wit and imagination, are thrown the sable hues of misanthropy and despair. They are all held in the bondage of one frowning and bitter feeling. They all bear the impress of one versatile, but not comprehensive, mind. They are all fruits of one individual's peculiar experience of life. They all display the gulf of darkness and despair, into which great genius is hur-

ried, when it is delivered over to bad passions. The lesson they teach is degrading. It casts doubt and insecurity on the noblest objects of life. It is the philosophy of madness and misery, teaching that all happiness is shadowy, all aspiration futile.

“ We wither from our youth, we gasp away —
Sick — sick ; unfound the boon — unslaked the thirst,
Though to the last, in verge of our decay,
Some phantom lures, such as we sought at first —
But all too late, — so are we doubly cursed.
Love, fame, ambition, avarice — 't is the same,
Each idle — and all ill — and none the worst,
For all are meteors with a different name,
And Death the sable smoke where vanishes the flame.”

Such consolatory philosophy as this would not seem to carry with it any charm, derived either from its truth or its attractiveness. Though it speaks for the human race, it is still but the diseased experience of one heart, having no general truth either in the nature of man or the nature of things. It is no more philosophical than it would be for a thief, on his way to the gallows, to conclude that men were born to be hanged, — or for a bad poet, on his way to oblivion, to conclude that books were written to be damned. Misanthropy is a malady of the mind ; all men are not misanthropical, any more than all men are diseased. In itself, this condition of the soul has few attractions, except for those who can sympathize with it, or whose own experience echoes its teachings. But in Byron it is often accompanied by qualities which either soften its harshness, or give it altogether the lie. It is most seductive, when blended with things whose reality it denies. The gloom of his meditations is laced with light in all directions. Touches of pathos, tributes of affection, gushes of passionate feeling, gleams of beauty, kindling utterances for freedom and humanity, — these continually appear in company with a cynicism which sneers at the objects to which they appeal, or despair which doubts their existence.

We now propose to hazard a few observations on the nature of Byron's perversions of his genius, followed by an examination of the spirit which animates “ *Manfred*” and “ *Cain*,” and concluding with some acknowledgment of the force of his delineations, and the exquisite delicacy of some of his perceptions of beauty and goodness. It is hard-

ly possible to do this without a seeming inconsistency; for a distinction is to be made, not only between his life and his writings, but between one portion of his writings and another. We must admit, that, however Satanic some of his compositions may be, and however depraved the tone of much of his meditation, he never lost a keen perception of the pure and the beautiful; and that, in action, he was neither so bad nor so good as he was in thought.

Byron's misanthropy, real or affected, sometimes induced him to give prominence to qualities essentially unpoetical. The frequent perversion of his powers, and the unhealthy moral atmosphere which surrounds some of his most splendid creations, have given point to a sarcastic epigram, which declares that his ethical system is compounded of misanthropy and licentiousness, the first command of which is, "Hate your neighbour, and love your neighbour's wife." Coarse appetites, selfish passions, flippant impieties, a sullen hatred of mankind — things generally deemed base and degrading in themselves, — he could so represent, by cunning tricks of diction, as to confer upon them a factitious beauty and dignity. "Paint not the sepulchre of thyself, and strive not to beautify thy corruption," was a remark of an old English writer, and Byron might have practised on it to advantage. If we analyze some of the beautiful passages in "*Manfred*" and "*Childe Harold*," we shall find, that the beauty is rather in appearance than in substance, in the outward show and dress of the sentiment rather than in its spirit, in words more than in ideas. Translated into plain prose, they would seem either horrible or laughable. In this, one of Byron's many characteristics, he reverses a peculiarity of Wordsworth. The latter evolves the latent beauty residing in objects which appear mean and unpoetical to the eye; Byron casts the drapery of the beautiful over things intrinsically mean and bad, and renders them poetical to the eye. Wordsworth would experience the same satisfaction in delineating a peasant or a pedler, which Byron would find in drawing a philosophical debauchee or a sentimental pirate. The former, placing a confiding trust in the essential dignity and elevation of his theme, is contented with simplicity of diction; the latter, feeling the unworthiness of his subject, dazzles and blinds the eye with a blaze of words. If Wordsworth is inclined to make poverty and peasants too elevated, Byron is

disposed to make piracy and robbers too respectable. Both superadd imaginary attributes upon the realities which the names of their characters suggest ; but one aims to shed beauty over humble virtue, the other labors to make vice splendid.

If Byron, in his bitter and reckless moods, took pleasure in idealizing the bad, he received no less in degrading the ideal. To his haughty and self-aggrandizing will, it seemed, that the force of his genius could alter the relations and distinctions of things, and make both the moral and natural world dependent on the caprices of his sensibility. His readers were to be his vassals, and reflect the changes of his own feelings. He loved power for its own sake, and took delight in its mere exercise. An impulse or a whim he would obey, as other men obey a law or a principle. And then he seems, at times, a mere actor, with the world for his audience, striving to produce brilliant effects, and by no means careless of the applause of the pit. "*Don Juan*," it is probable, best reflects his mind and character in their general aspects. It resembles his private letters and journals more than any of his other works. It is full both of intensity and recklessness. Pictures of beauty are painted with hues "that are words, and speak to ye of heaven," only to be rudely daubed with an impatient dash of the same pencil that wrought their exceeding loveliness ; majestic edifices are erected, only to be overthrown ; statues, full of life and earnest feeling, are created, only to be dashed petulantly to pieces.

Indeed, Byron experienced great delight in producing those "brisk shocks of surprise," which come from the yoking together of the mean and the exalted, the coarse and the tender. Some of these do little credit to his heart, and, in fact, cast "ominous conjecture" on the truthfulness of his feelings. Thus, in the description of Haidee leaning over the sleeping Juan, one of the most beautiful pictures in poetry is sacrificed to the scoffing demon of his wit :

" Like to an angel, o'er the dying
Who die in righteousness, she leaned ; and there
All tranquilly the shipwrecked boy was lying,
As o'er him lay the calm and stirless air.
But Zoë the mean time some eggs was frying ;
Since, after all, no doubt the youthful pair
Must breakfast, and betimes — lest they should ask it,
She drew out her provision from the basket."

Again, a most warm and fanciful description of a rainbow closes in imagery drawn from pugilism :

“ A heavenly chameleon,
The airy child of vapor and the sun,
Brought forth in purple, cradled in vermillion,
Baptized in molten gold, and swathed in dun,
Glittering like crescents o'er a Turk's pavilion,
And blending every color into one, —
Just like a black eye in a recent scuffle
(For sometimes we must box without the muffle).”

A fine poetic consecration of one of the holiest feelings of the human heart, in “ Childe Harold,” ends with a touch of misanthropy, conceived in the very ingenuity of despair :

“ When the wife,
Blest into mother, in the innocent look,
Or even the piping cry of lips that brook
No pain and small suspense, a joy perceives
Man knows not, — *when from out its cradled nook*
She sees her little bud put forth its leaves,
What may the fruit be yet? — I know not — Cain was Eve's.”

A great deal of this perversion of imagination and levity of feeling, in Byron, we are willing to attribute to waywardness or affectation. But there are passages in his works, which are not merely licentious in tendency, but openly obscene. The higher literature of the present century is, in general, untainted with that impurity of thought and grossness of expression, which have too often characterized other brilliant periods of English letters. Lord Byron has the questionable honor of being an exception to this remark. Some portions of his works, for ribaldry and impiety, fairly bear off the palm from all other dabblers in dirt and blasphemy. At one period of his life, towards its close, he seems to have felt no responsibility to the world or to his own fame in the exercise of his talents. Much of this recklessness is, doubtless, to be laid to the intense bitterness of many of his miseries. In these moods, however, though his wit is often keen and his fancy affluent, he rarely raises a hearty laugh. The unhappiness which prompts the malignant jest is seen and felt, amid all the vivacity and glare of the expression. A person unacquainted with the character of Byron would infer from these bold and bad portions of his poems and letters, that his soul was the seat of obdurate malice. They seem to illustrate what Dr. Johnson calls “ the frigid villany of studious lewdness, the calm malignity

of labored impiety." They are singularly hard, cold, almost inhuman, in their tone of wickedness. They have none of that soft and graceful voluptuousness, with which poets usually gild and humanize sensuality, and of which Byron himself was, when he pleased, so consummate a master. To denounce them in the usual language applied to immoral works would not do justice to the depth of their turpitude. They enable us to understand what the old scholastic meant, when he called poetry "the devil's wine." They carry us back to the brilliant depravities of Congreve and Wycherly, when virtue was a jest, and piety the mark of a despised Puritan; but they are permeated with a power, to which those rakes of the drama could present no claim. To judge of Byron, however, by these alone, or to build up a theory of his character with these as a basis, would be to do him injustice. In themselves, they are worthy only of unalloyed detestation; but they merely illustrate one of the numerous phases of the author's nature. They are the foul offspring of those moments when he hated himself, the world, and heaven; when all the bitterness of irreligion and misanthropy, and all the noisome vapors arising from the dregs of bad passions, were blended in a frightful union with art and imagination; the reaction from those moods, when, to use his own words,

"His mind became,
In its own eddy, boiling and o'erwrought,
A whirling gulf of fantasy and flame."

We do not wish to dwell on these foul blots on Byron's fame, or to penetrate into those recesses of his heart where they had birth. Misanthropy, when displayed in wit, satire, and mockery, is a more pitiable object than misanthropy in the darkest hues of despair. It is in "Cain," "Manfred," and the fourth canto of "Childe Harold," — especially in the two former, — that we are to look for the prominent features of Byron's peculiar view of life, and the nature of his influence upon his age. This leads us to the consideration of what Southey stigmatized as the "Satanic school of poetry," or the poetry of sin. In the works to which we have referred, Byron gives us the heroism of wickedness and misery, — guilt, conscious of itself, and wrung with remorse, yet proud of its power of endurance, and daring and defying heaven and hell, in the full view of the consequences of its acts. It is remorse without repentance, —

misery that seeks neither hope nor alleviation. All weak emotions are discarded from its dark catalogue of crime and suffering. It defies self-will, and is impatient of imperfection, not of good, but of evil. The bonds of clay, that check the energies of the mind, it feels as a limitation and a curse. It plucks its illustrations from those aspects of nature, where life flourishes in desolation, and is triumphant over all obstacles to its growth and strength :

“ From their nature will the tannen grow
Loftiest on loftiest and least sheltered rocks,
Rooted in barrenness, where naught below
Of soil supports them 'gainst the Alpine shocks
Of eddying storms; yet springs the trunk, and mocks
The howling tempest, till its height and frame
Are worthy of the mountains from whose blocks
Of *bleak, gray granite* into life it came,
And grew a giant tree ; — the mind may grow the same.”

The answer of this misanthropy to all entreaties for repentance is, in the moody phrase of Manfred, — “It is too late.” It can exist without happiness. Cain asks Lucifer, in reference to the rebel angels, —

“ Are ye happy ?
Lucifer. We are mighty.
Cain. Are ye happy ?
Lucifer. No ! Art thou ?”

But if happiness be not needed, neither is there a sting to death, though the soul be laden with unrepented sins. The last words that Manfred utters, as he turns his glazing eyes to the man of God by his side, are the most awful in the drama :

“ Old man ! 't is not so difficult to die.”

That is, hell can be borne !

Suffering, in natures thus lifted from the mass, and strong in the heroism of despair, needs no aid from piety and human feeling, but can be endured unshrinkingly by the mind, — “itself an equal to all woes.”

“ Existence may be borne, and the deep root
Of life and sufferance make its firm abode
In bare and desolated bosoms : mute
The camel labors with the heaviest load,
And the wolf dies in silence.”

Prometheus, whose “impenetrable spirit earth and heaven could not convulse,” is the ideal of this patient endurance of

torture ; for Byron was not ever the champion of noisy miseries and talkative despair, but could feel the power of

“ Silent suffering, and intense ;
The rock, the vulture, and the chain,
All that the proud can feel of pain,
The agony they do not show,
The suffocating sense of woe,
Which speaks but in its loneliness,
*And then is jealous, lest the sky
Should have a listener, nor will sigh
Until its voice is echoless.*”

Hope and joy, to this stern misanthropy, are bubbles that break in every breath of experience. No one can escape the inevitable doom. The only relief is to be sought in a sullen endurance of misery, which takes a grim delight in the consciousness of the capacity to suffer; or in a strength of will, which would scale the “cherubim-defended battlements” of heaven, and quail not before the “fire-armed angels,” in its rhapsodies of meditation. Those who, when once deceived by hope, weave again the same web of delusion, only fall deeper into the pit of wretchedness or meanness:

“ Some, bowed and bent,
Wax gray and ghastly, withering ere their time,
And perish with the reed on which they leant ;
Some seek devotion, toil, war, good, or crime,
According as their souls were formed to sink or climb.”

Life, at the best, is an evil. Pain and suffering track the happiest. Only in the stern defiance or endurance of evil can the soul find any stability.

“ Count o’er the joys thine hours have seen,
Count o’er thy days from anguish free,
And know, whatever thou hast been,
’T is something better not to be.”

It is almost needless to say, that Byron never reached the point of indifference to misery and hatred of the world, which he loved to contemplate. This was his ideal of greatness, and he never realized it. It had a charm for his swift passions and his daring fancy; but he was too weak and veering to practise it consistently in life. He was no hero, either in the service of Satan or the service of heaven. But he had a large inward experience of that condition of the heart, from which the devilish in conduct flows; and he has represented it with marvellous force and skill. In “Man-

fred," especially, he has arrayed the Satanic aspect of life in a gloomy majesty, which makes it act powerfully on the imagination. A kind of shuddering sympathy is awakened for the hero. The stormy emotions which convulse his being; the demoniacal pride with which his agonies are borne; the intensity and might of passion, which breathe and burn in almost every word he utters; the picturesque sublimity of the scenes in which the action of the piece passes; the occasional touches of quiet beauty and holy sentiment, which shoot across the ravings of remorse, or twinkle in the sombre imagery of despair; and the continuity of the feeling which overspreads and pervades the whole drama; — all these give to the work a singular fascination, from which it is difficult to escape. Manfred represents a man of superhuman pride and superhuman ambition, — bound by no moral laws, which yet have the power to scourge him, — hating the world and his kind, and seemingly fated to be a curse to himself, and to all who meet him either in love or hate. In his confession to the Witch of the Alps, we have a most distinct statement of that disgust for mankind, that yearning after superhuman knowledge, that wild search in the loneliest and most tempestuous aspects of nature for sympathy with inward emotions, with which the writings of Byron teem. He says,

" From my youth upward,
My spirit walked not with the souls of men,
Nor looked upon the earth with human eyes;
The thirst of their ambition was not mine;
The aim of their existence was not mine;
My joys, my griefs, my passions, and my powers,
Made me a stranger; though I wore the form,
I had no sympathy with breathing flesh."

In another connection, he represents himself as having had in his youth noble aspirations to sway the minds of men, and to be the enlightener of nations; but his thoughts "mistook themselves":

"I could not tame my nature down; for he
Must serve who fain would sway, — and sooth — and sue —
And watch all time — and pry into all place —
And be a living lie — who would become
A mighty thing among the mean; and such
The mass are. I disdained to mingle with
A herd, though to be leader — and of wolves.
The lion is alone, and so am I."

The crime which lends such mysterious horror to the re-

morse and despair of Manfred is one which the pen hesitates to write. It is but obscurely hinted in his wild utterances. But its remembrance is to him continual torment :

“Look on me in my sleep,
Or watch my watchings. Come and sit by me !
My solitude is solitude no more,
But peopled with the Furies I have gnashed
My teeth in darkness till returning morn,
Then cursed myself till sunset ; — I have prayed
For madness as a blessing — ’t is denied me.”

In the description of her whom he loved, and whom he destroyed, whose heart withered when it gazed on his, — a passion terrible in its consequences both to him and to her, — some traits of his own character and the Satanic character are thrown in by contrast :

“She was like me in lineaments — her eyes
Her hair, her features, all, to the very tone
Even of her voice, they said were like to mine ;
But softened all, and tempered into beauty :
She had the same lone thoughts and wanderings,
The quest of hidden knowledge, and a mind
To comprehend the universe ; nor these
Alone, but with them gentler powers than mine,
Pity, and smiles, and tears — *which I had not* ;
And tenderness — but that I had for her ;
Humility — *and that I never had*.
Her faults were mine — her virtues were her own.”

We cannot refrain from making one more extract from this drama, in illustration of the inspiration of evil from which it takes its character, and the theory of sorrow and misery, as well as grandeur, which it inculcates.

“There is an order
Of mortals on the earth, who do become
Old in their youth, and die ere middle age,
Without the violence of warlike death.
Some perishing of pleasure — some of study —
Some worn with toil — some of mere weariness —
Some of disease — and some of insanity —
And some of withered or of broken hearts ;
For this last is a malady which slays
More than are numbered in the lists of Fate, —
Taking all shapes and bearing many names.”

There is something noble in the roll of these lines, which dignifies the pride and bitterness of soul from which they proceed.

The tremendous depth and intensity of passion, which Byron was capable of representing with such marvellous

skill of expression, is powerfully displayed in his misanthropical creations, and lends to them much of the sorcery they exercise on the feelings. When once we are fairly borne along the foaming and glittering tide of his impulsive genius, it becomes hard to muster any moral scruples as to the direction of the flood. Few poets excel him in the instantaneous sympathy he creates, even among minds having no natural affinity with his own. He is eminently the poet of passion. In almost all the changes of his mood, the same energy of feeling glows in his verse. The thought or emotion uppermost in his mind at any one time, whether it be bad or good, seems to sway, for the moment, all the faculties of his nature. He has a passionate love for evil, a passionate love for nature, for goodness, for beauty, and, we may add, a passionate love for himself. When he sits in the place of the scoffer, his words betray the same inspiration from impulse, — the same passion, though condensed into bitterness and mockery. If we carefully observe the thoughtful and tender portions of his writings, we shall often find that the tenderness is but .

“ Moonlight on a troubled sea,
Brightening the storm it cannot calm.”

Restlessness is the characteristic of his nature. He himself speaks of his verse as bearing him onward as the wind bears the cloud; and his hatred of restraint and “proud precipitance of soul” are well expressed in his exulting gladness at being again on the boisterous element he loved :

“ Once more upon the waters ! — yet, once more !
And the waves bound beneath me as a steed
That knows its rider. Welcome to their roar !
Swift be their guidance, wheresoe’er it lead !
Though the strained mast should quiver as a reed,
And the strained canvass fluttering strew the gale,
Yet must I on ; for I am as a weed
Hung from the rock, on ocean’s foam, to sail
Where’er the surge may sweep, the tempest’s breath prevail.”

The force of passion with which he could express his sense of individual wrong, and his power of carrying the heart with him in his sorrowful consecrations of his own miseries, are displayed with a wild and smiting energy of utterance in the following stanzas :

“ And if my voice break forth, ’t is not that now
I shrink from what is suffered : let him speak
Who hath beheld decline upon my brow,
Or seen my mind’s convulsion leave it weak ;
But in this page a record will I seek.
Not in the air shall these my words disperse,
Though I be ashes ; a far hour shall wreak
The deep prophetic fulness of this verse,
And pile on human heads the mountain of my curse !

“ That curse shall be Forgiveness. Have I not —
Hear me, my mother Earth ! behold it Heaven ! —
Have I not had to wrestle with my lot ?
Have I not suffered things to be forgiven ?
Have I not had my brain seared, my heart riven,
Hopes sapped, name blighted, Life’s life lied away ?
And only not to desperation driven,
Because not altogether of such clay
As rots into the souls of those whom I survey ?

“ From mighty wrongs to petty perfidy,
Have I not seen what human things could do ?
From the loud roar of foaming calumny
To the small whisper of the as paltry few,
And subtler venom of the reptile crew,
The Janus glance of whose significant eye,
Learning to lie with silence, would *seem* true,
And without utterance, save the shrug or sigh,
Deal round to happy fools its speechless obloquy.

“ But I have lived, and have not lived in vain :
My mind may lose its force, my blood its fire,
And my frame perish even in conquering pain ;
But there is that within me which shall tire
Torture and Time, and breathe when I expire ;
Something unearthly, which they deem not of,
Like the remembered tone of a mute lyre,
Shall on their softened spirits sink, and move
In hearts all rocky now the late remorse of love.”

This passionateness of Byron’s nature is, as we have already observed, manifested in all his writings. But it is sometimes softened into delicacy and tenderness, and becomes remarkably pure and sweet in its flow. The passages of thoughtful beauty, which are scattered over his stormy and impulsive poems, — following, as they so often do, fierce bursts of passion, and the bad idolatry of hatred and despair, — are as pleasing to the eye as starlight after lightning. It is hardly necessary to enlarge on the fineness of his feeling for the beautiful, and the fertility of his imagination in images shaping it to the eye, and in tones suggesting it to the ear.

A large number of his imaginations have become the language of the emotions they consecrate, and many are fast passing into the common speech of Englishmen. In the third and fourth cantos of "*Childe Harold*," in "*Don Juan*," in the narratives and meditations which he has cast in a dramatic form, passages might be selected of most witching loveliness, of deep pathos, of sad and mournful beauty of sentiment, of aspiration after truth and goodness, — of pity, and charity, and faith, and humanity, and love. These display "how hard it is for a noble spirit to divorce itself wholly from what is good." From among many illustrations of this softness and beauty of feeling, we select the following sonnet :

"Thy cheek is pale with thought, but not from woe ;
And yet so lovely, that, if Mirth could flush
Its rose of whiteness with the brightest blush,
My heart would wish away that ruder glow :
And dazzle not thy deep-blue eyes — but, O,
While gazing on them, sterner eyes will gush,
And into mine my mother's weakness rush,
Soft as the last drops round heaven's airy bow.
For, through thy long dark lashes low depending,
The soul of melancholy Gentleness
Gleams like a seraph from the sky descending,
Above all pain, yet pitying all distress ;
At once such majesty with sweetness blending,
I worship more, but cannot love thee less."

It is very difficult to connect the scattered characteristics of Byron's genius, so as to give a distinct notion of his personal character. Most certainly he was not a great man in action. He had no calm, self-sustaining energy of nature, few consistent opinions, little breadth of understanding. Irresolution, weakness, a reckless indifference to the consequences of his actions, a kind of settled feeling that he must yield to every impulse of his sensibility, a remarkable absence of any thing like a reference of his conduct to moral laws, — these absolutely stare us in the face, as we read his letters and journals. As regards reason, his whole strength lay in his insight; and his momentary glimpses of truth were sometimes peculiarly vivid and clear. In his speculations, or rather declarations, on subjects disconnected with poetry, we often discern many bright hints of truth; but he had not sufficient patience or comprehensiveness to follow them to their results, or to bind them together in logical order. As re-

gards strength of character, his force consisted in passion, not in principle. No vicious man ever lashed vice in others with more power. Not an inconsiderable portion of his writings, both in prose and verse, represents him as the critic of his contemporaries, and the censor and satirist of his age. When we read some of his fierce attacks on George the Fourth,

“The fourth of the fools and cowards, called George,”

and the bitterness of invective with which he treated the sins of other prominent culprits, we are ready to exclaim, with Sir Thomas Browne, “While thou so hotly disclaimest against the Devil, be not guilty of diabolism.” Again, no man volunteered his opinions with more freedom on literature, theology, politics, and society; but it is difficult to make any discrimination between his opinions and his antipathies, or to discover any law of change which regulated the passage of his antipathies into his loves. His taste was capricious in the extreme. His opinion of any person, or any institution, or any aspiration, varied with the physical variations of his body, and was often very different after a debauch from what it was after a ride. No one could infer his judgment of to-morrow from his judgment of to-day. The friend that appeared in the eulogy of one week was likely to point the squib of the next. His consistency in criticism was according to his constancy in hatred. Wordsworth and Southey he always disliked and always abused. As a critic, he has propounded some of the most untenable opinions ever uttered by a man of genius. He often mistook his whims and antipathies for laws of taste. When Keats’s poems appeared, he entreats Murray to get some one to crush the little mannikin to pieces. After the article in the *Quarterly* was published, and the death of Keats was supposed to have been accelerated by its brutality, he abuses Murray for killing him, and discovers that there was much merit in the “mannikin’s” poetry. It would be easy to multiply examples of this instability and levity of character; but for any reader of his letters and journals, such instances would be needless.

The personal and poetical popularity of Byron is still great. The circulation of his works, even at the present time, exceeds that of Wordsworth, Shelley, Southey, and

Coleridge united. Scott is the only poet, among his contemporaries, who at all rivals him in the number of readers. Many of his gloomy creations will long frown defiance upon time. It is certainly a calamity to the world, that a poet possessing such wide influence over the heart should too often have exercised it in cultivating and honoring its base and moody passions ; should have robed sin in beauty, and conferred dignity on vice ; should have given new allurements to that Dead-sea fruit,

“ Which tempts the eye,
But turns to ashes on the lip ” ;

should have shown such brilliant audacity in assaults on the dearest interests of society ; and, by the force of his example and the splendor of his mind, should be able to perpetuate his errors and his vices through many generations to come. It is of importance, not only to morals, but to taste, that there should be no delusion as to the nature of these perversions of his genius ; that his wit should not shield his ribaldry from condemnation, nor his imagination be received in extenuation of his blasphemy. In speaking of Byron, as in speaking of men of meaner minds, things should be called by their right names. The method too apt to be pursued towards him is to gloss over his faults with some smooth sentimentalities about his temptations ; or to speak of them with a singular relaxation of the rigidity of moral laws. But it seems to us impossible to defend his character, even as we defend the character of many men of genius whose lives labor under some bad imputations. As soon as sophistry has dexterously disposed of one charge, a thousand others crowd up to be answered. He has written his own condemnation. The faults of his life blaze out in his verse, and glitter on almost every page of his correspondence. And the most that charity itself can do is to repeat the mournful regret of the good abbot over the sins of Manfred :

“ This should have been a noble creature : he
Hath all the energy which would have made
A goodly frame of glorious elements,
Had they been wisely mingled ; as it is,
It is an awful chaos — light and darkness —
And mind and dust — and passions and pure thoughts,
Mixed, and contending without end or order,
All dormant or destructive.”